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With all but the most glacier-like parking-lot snow packs melted and Easter around the corner, can lawn-mowing season be far behind?

Of course not, and that means it's time to get the mower a spring tuneup.

But a lot of people don't, says Scott Ewing, owner of The Sharpening Center, 1327 Goshen Ave.

"People tend to wait for the last minute," says Ewing, who's been servicing lawn mowers since at least 1990. "My advice would be probably to bring them in earlier. That way you'll get it back sooner."

Ewing says mowers should get professional attention at least once a year. Spring is a good time because a few simple steps then can improve engine efficiency, reduce emissions, prevent costly repairs and extend a mower's life – as well as lead to a better-looking lawn.

Grant UMBER, owner of UMBER's Do it Best Hardware, 1814 Maplecrest Road, says 90 percent of springtime problems with mowers stem from what people didn't do before putting the mower away.

In maintaining a lawnmower, "Probably the most important part is how you store it over the off-season," UMBER says. He says most springtime problems are carburetor malfunctions from gas that was left in the mower going bad.

Some companies, including RepairClinic.com, sell tuneup kits stocked with the right parts for a specific engine model. Jeff Linderman, the online company's small engine expert, says kits take the guesswork out of mower maintenance.

But UMBER says checking with a local repair shop first might be in order for the thrifty.

"Getting a whole tuneup kit isn't bad, but it's often not necessary," he says. "It could be just one thing, like a spark plug."

Here are some tips to keep lawn mowers running like new.

Use a clean air filter. The air filter prevents dirt, dust and debris from entering the carburetor and engine. "It doesn't have to look brand-new, but you want to make sure it's not black," UMBER says. The air filter should be cleaned or changed every 25 hours of mowing time or at least once per mowing season. Only foam filters can be cleaned; pleated paper ones must be replaced.

Use a clean fuel filter. Fuel filters cannot be cleaned. "You just need a new one," UMBER says. Consult the owner's manual for the proper technique.

Replace the oil. This step is also recommended every 25 hours of cut time. "But if a lawn is really dusty, change it more often," UMBER says. Every eight hours of use, it's wise to check the oil; like vehicle engine oil, it should be golden or amber. It darkens with age. When replacing oil, recycle the used stuff.

Replace the spark plug. “A spark plug should be replaced at least once per season, even if it appears to be working fine,” Linderman says. Over time, a plug’s performance will degrade from carbon build-up and a weakened electrode, dramatically increasing fuel use and polluting emissions and reducing engine performance, he says.

Check the blade. A dull blade tears the grass, rather than shearing it cleanly, Ewing says. Blade sharpening should be done at least once a season, but can be needed as often as three to four times, depending on use, he says. It’s probably a job best left to experts – uneven sharpening could tear up the motor or your lawn and leaving dings and dents could lead to accidents.

Check tire pressure. Pressure isn’t as crucial as in a car, Ewing says, but periodically, you should use a tire pressure gauge to ensure consistent tire pressure. Tires with varying pressure can result in uneven or poor cutting.

Clean the undercarriage. Mower makers recommend that after every use, you should use a hose to remove grass clippings and debris build-up in a mower’s undercarriage. Be sure to turn off the motor and disconnect the spark plug first.

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